

City of Milwaukee Health Department

Division of Disease Control & Prevention

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Frequently Asked Questions on *E. coli* O157:H7 Infections

(As of 9/19/06AM)

What is causing the current outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections?

The current outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 is thought to be caused by fresh spinach. At this time, City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) is working closely with state and federal agencies to identify all possible sources of spinach contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7.

Can I eat the fresh spinach or spinach-containing products I have at home?

At this time, no specific brand or lot numbers have been identified, but due to the possible complications that can be associated with an infection, including death; the FDA has recommended that consumers refrain from eating fresh spinach or spinach-containing products. MHD advises that people should throw out all fresh spinach and spinach-containing products, and should not to eat any fresh spinach or spinach-containing products until more information about brands and lot numbers becomes available.

What brands have been recalled by the FDA?

This is the most current list we have from FDA. *The list could be expanded to include more brands, but these are the ones we know of so far for your information. Again, the FDA and MHD are warning people not to eat ANY fresh spinach.*

Natural Selection Foods, LLC, of San Juan Bautista, California, is recalling all of its products containing spinach in all brands they pack with "Best if Used by Dates" of August 17, 2006 through October 1, 2006. These products include spinach and any salad with spinach in a blend, both retail and food service products. Products that do not contain spinach are not part of this recall.

Natural Selection Foods, LLC brands include: Natural Selection Foods, Pride of San Juan, Earthbound Farm, Bellissima, Dole, Rave Spinach, Emeril, Sysco, O Organic, Fresh Point, River Ranch, Superior, Nature's Basket, Pro-Mark, Compliments, Trader Joe's, Ready Pac, Jansal Valley, Cheney Brothers, Coastline, D'Arrigo Brothers, Green Harvest, Mann, Mills Family Farm, Premium Fresh, Snoboy, The Farmer's Market, Tanimura & Antle, President's Choice, Cross Valley, and Riverside Farms.

FDA has also been informed that River Ranch, of California, is recalling packages of spring mix containing spinach. River Ranch obtained bulk spring mix containing spinach from Natural Selections. The following brands are involved: Farmers Market, Hy Vee, Fresh and Easy. Products that do not contain spinach are not part of this recall.

FDA continues to investigate whether other companies and brands are involved.

I ate bagged spinach within the last couple of days, what should I do?

Unfortunately there are no medicines available that will decrease the chances of you becoming ill if the bagged spinach was contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7, and since no specific brand or lot numbers of bagged spinach have been identified by the FDA, MHD can not say for certain whether the spinach that you have eaten was contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria. However, due to the number of cases being reported, it is unlikely that the spinach you have eaten was contaminated.

The average amount of time that it takes for a person to show symptoms of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection is anywhere from 2 to 10 days. If you have recently eaten spinach, MHD recommends that you monitor your health, and if you begin to show signs or symptoms compatible with an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection, you should seek medical attention from your primary health care provider.

Can I eat other freshly bagged lettuce products or produce?

At this time, there is no evidence linking other freshly bagged lettuce products or produce and MHD is not recommending that consumers avoid any other types of freshly bagged lettuce. IF THE LETTUCE OR SALAD PRODUCT CONTAINS SPINACH, HOWEVER, IT SHOULD NOT BE CONSUMED.

What causes an *E. Coli* O157:H7 infection?

E. coli O157:H7 is a bacterial infection that infects a person's intestinal tract and may produce a toxin that affects other parts of the body as well. Infections can occur anytime during the year, but usually occur more frequently during the summer months. Infections usually occur from eating contaminated beef that is not properly cooked, although other foods may also be contaminated. If good hand hygiene practices are not practiced, infections can also be spread by person to person contact.

What are the symptoms of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection?

- ☞ Diarrhea (often bloody)
- ☞ Severe abdominal cramps
- ☞ Fever is usually absent

If I ate fresh spinach longer than a week ago, could I get sick from having eaten it?

If it has been longer than a week since a person has eaten the spinach, it is unlikely that they have been infected.

If a person has symptoms similar to *E. coli* O157:H7, what should they do?

They should seek consultation with their doctor, medical clinic or other primary healthcare provider.

Are there other health complications that can occur due to an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection?

In some instances, primarily in children under the age of 5 and the elderly, the infection may cause hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), which can lead to kidney failure and possibly death.

How long would it take for me to show symptoms of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection if I am infected?

Infections will usually not appear until 2 days after person has been exposed to *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria.

How can people protect themselves from *E. coli* O157:H7 infection?

Individuals can protect themselves by keeping raw meats separate from ready to eat foods, and properly cook all beef products to a proper temperature of 160 degrees F throughout. Individuals should also wash all fruits and vegetables prior to serving. Additionally, individuals should avoid drinking unpasteurized beverage products to avoid possible infection.

The other important way to protect yourself from infection is by proper hand-washing – with soap and water before and after food preparation, between handling raw meats and ready-to-eat foods and after using the toilet.

In addition to the information above, infections have been associated with exposures to recreational water sources (ie. lakes and rivers), petting zoos and other sources. Individuals should not consume water from these recreational sources and in both of the cases listed above, should practice proper hand-washing immediately after an exposure to recreational water or visiting a petting zoo.

Where can I go to find more information on *E. coli* O157:H7?

- ☞ For general information on *E. coli* infection, the automated MHD informational hotline can be reached at 414-286-3616
- ☞ MHD Website at www.milwaukee.gov/health